

### *A Rationale for Guided Reading*

Before children go to school, the process of being able to read text that is more and more decontextualized is guided informally by the responses of caregivers and preschool teachers. Some children focus a great deal of attention on reading and writing and quickly develop deep understanding, seemingly with little effort. Others have some basic knowledge of literacy—familiarity with the language of stories and with particular letters, sounds, and words—but they need help figuring out the complex process of reading text. As they work with text, children develop a network of strategies that allow them to attend to information from different sources. Information from these sources is, for the most part, implicitly or subconsciously held, but it is the foundation for reading text.

Clay (1993a) clusters these sources of information into three categories: meaning, structure, and visual cues.

1. *Meaning cues* come from children's life experiences. Meaning is represented in their memories and in the language they use to talk about that meaning. This means that reading has to "make sense." As Holdaway (1979) says, if children have heard stories read aloud, they have formed high expectations of written language. They expect it to make sense and they expect to be intrigued by aspects of the text.

2. *Structural or syntactic cues* come from knowing how oral language is put together. Language is rule-governed; words are not strung together haphazardly but conform to rules. For example, "She wore a red dress" conforms to the syntactic rules of English. The sentence can be reconfigured in several ways and still "sound right" to an English speaker, but "she a red wore dress" is impossible. It doesn't match the rules we have all assimilated while learning to speak a language.

3. *Visual cues* come from knowing the relationship between oral language and its

graphic symbols—the letters that are formed into words divided by spaces and arranged on the page, and the conventions of print such as punctuation. A child may have learned the distinctive features of a few letters, perhaps those in her name. She may even have developed the ability to produce these letters over and over in writing. The first letters serve as exemplars, helping the child "learn how to learn": she learns what to notice about letters and how to compare letters with each other.

Children have these sources of information at their disposal but may not know how to access and use them while reading extended text. It is one thing to recognize visual features of a letter or word in isolation. It is another to use visual information that is embedded in text. The teacher mediates the process for the young reader.

It is usually not enough simply to provide children with good reading materials. Teacher guidance is essential. A major decision is selecting the texts that children encounter while they are building their reading systems. First, children must have many opportunities to read all kinds of texts. A balanced program will provide a large variety of texts organized by level of difficulty. Book selection is discussed in depth in Chapter 10, but there are two basic questions teachers should ask themselves about the books their students read every day:

1. Is the text consistently so easy that children have no opportunity to build their problem-solving strategies?
2. Is the text so difficult to process that children get no real opportunity to read?

If the answer to the first question is yes, then children may be reading but not solving the problems a more challenging text would provide. An easy text that nevertheless introduces a few unfamiliar words or language structures allows the child to practice the "in the head" operations that build the system. It is not the words that are important

but the thought processes required to figure out the new words while maintaining the meaning of the text. In the earlier *Spider*, *Spider* example, the pictures provided clear clues to the meaning, but readers had to look closely at the word *not* in the sentence “No, no, Spider, not me.” They had to examine detail while maintaining the meaning and their own sense of how language was structured. The text provided a context for using word-solving skills and for checking the process by using knowledge of the story and sentence pattern.

A child who can carry out this process on beginning texts is on the way to learning “how to learn” in reading. The process has been described by Clay (1991a) as “learning how to access visual sources of information while reading for meaning with divided attention” (p. 286). The more children use problem-solving while reading for meaning, the greater and more flexible their problem-solving repertoires become. It is the responsibility of the teacher, therefore, to be sure that children receive the support and guidance they need to read challenging texts every day. Guided reading is designed to support that process.

More commonly, the second question is answered yes—children are reading texts that are too difficult for them. Our rule of thumb is that if the reader, with an introduction and support, cannot read about 90 percent of the words accurately, the text is too difficult. The accuracy analysis here is not a test of the reader but a test of the teacher’s selection and introduction of the text. A hard text for a reader does not provide an opportunity for smooth problem solving, and for meaning to guide the process. The process may break down into individual word calling (or frantic random guessing) that does not make sense and is not productive.

When children solve words using visual information, they need to be able to verify their success using meaning and structure cues. At the same time, they make predic-

tions from language structure and meaning (what the text is likely to say) while checking their predictions against the makeup of the word, asking implicitly, Does it look right? Accuracy of reading is not as important as learning the process of using different sources of information, self-monitoring, and cross-checking; the process is too difficult if the text is hard.

If the texts are extremely difficult, the situation is even more disastrous for the young reader. This can happen when the more inexperienced children are forced into “whole-class” reading or into reading basals that contain almost no texts a given group of children can read. In this case, the process completely breaks down and there may be bizarre responses such as “mumble reading.” Children may also attempt to read along without looking at the print, trying to remember the entire text, or just read along one step behind all the other children with almost no independent processing. The situation for the child would be something like performing in a choir without knowing the music or words.

The answer is not to eliminate whole-class experiences but to use them for activities like shared reading and interactive writing, which are designed for the class community or a small group. Nor is it practical or even desirable to teach each child individually. Guided reading takes advantage of social support and allows the teacher to operate efficiently, to work with the tension between ease and challenge that is necessary to support readers’ moving forward in their learning.

### *The Essentials of Guided Reading*

Figure 1–1 outlines the essential elements of guided reading. It summarizes the teacher’s and children’s actions before, during, and after the reading.

#### **What the teacher does**

The teacher’s actions emerge from (1) observing the children as they read and write.

The Essential Elements of Guided Reading

	Before the reading	During the reading	After the reading
Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selects an appropriate text, one that will be supportive but with a few problems to solve</li> <li>• prepares an introduction to the story</li> <li>• briefly introduces the story, keeping in mind the meaning, language, and visual information in the text, and the knowledge, experience, and skills of the reader</li> <li>• leaves some questions to be answered through reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "listens in"</li> <li>• observes the reader's behaviors for evidence of strategy use</li> <li>• confirms children's problem-solving attempts and successes</li> <li>• interacts with individuals to assist with problem solving at difficulty (when appropriate)</li> <li>• makes notes about the strategy use of individual readers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talks about the story with the children</li> <li>• invites personal response</li> <li>• returns to the text for one or two teaching opportunities such as finding evidence or discussing problem-solving</li> <li>• assesses children's understanding of what they read</li> <li>• sometimes engages the children in extending the story through such activities as drama, writing, art, or more reading</li> </ul>
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engage in a conversation about the story</li> <li>• raise questions</li> <li>• build expectations</li> <li>• notice information in the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• read the whole text or a unified part to themselves (softly or silently)</li> <li>• request help in problem solving when needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talk about the story</li> <li>• check predictions and react personally to the story or information</li> <li>• revisit the text at points of problem solving as guided by the teacher</li> <li>• may reread the story to a partner or independently</li> <li>• sometimes engage in activities that involve extending and responding to the text (such as drama or journal writing)</li> </ul>

FIGURE 1-1 The essential elements of guided reading

and (2) studying and analyzing the available texts. The teacher's task is complex because he must constantly keep in mind text characteristics, reader characteristics, and a growing knowledge of the reading process and how people build this process in unique ways over time.

*Before the reading*

Knowing the individuals in the small group, the teacher selects a new text to introduce. He carefully matches the readers to a text that offers an appropriate level of support but also includes some challenges. Each new text provided to the group should have a few

new things to learn but not so many that children have to struggle. The teacher's goal is children's successful problem solving on an extended piece of text.

Introductions are brief and vary with each book. They also vary according to the readers' interests and needs and the characteristics of the text. The teacher's goal is to interest the children in the story, relate it to their experience, and provide a frame of meaning that will support problem solving. He discusses the title and author and provides an overall sense of what the book is about. Based on his knowledge of the children, the teacher may suggest personal connections to the story. The introduction is conversational rather than a prescribed story review or series of questions. It uses new or important vocabulary and syntactic structures that may be unfamiliar to the group. Even proper names that may be difficult for children can be emphasized in the introduction. It "debugs" the book for the children by directing their attention to new text features they will need to use as readers.

The teacher does not "preteach" words although he may call attention to a word in context, asking children to locate it and notice specific features such as the beginning letter. The teacher guides the readers to look at the pictures and understand the structure of the story and critical aspects of meaning. When working with inexperienced readers, the teacher may go all the way through the story talking about each picture. Sometimes a briefer summary-like overview will provide enough support for children to read the text successfully. The teacher would rarely read the book to the children first: the goal is for them to read it themselves.

### *During the reading*

Children who are just beginning to learn to read are asked to read softly to themselves; soon, they begin to read portions of the text silently. The ultimate goal of guided reading is independent silent reading. The teacher may "listen in" or ask a specific student to

read aloud softly. He looks for evidence of problem solving and intervenes as needed. His observations help him plan quickly what to teach after the first reading. This is a good time to take a few notes on a clipboard.

### *After the reading*

After a brief response to the story, the teacher may decide to do nothing but send the group back to other literacy activities. He may, however, return to a part of the text to bring some example to the children's attention or to support children's growing strategies. He may talk with the children about the ideas in the story or ask them how they liked the story and what it made them think about. For a particular text, the teacher may want to talk about the meaning of the story more extensively. Routinely, some teachers take a running record with one reader after the others have left the area; others establish another time during the day to take several running records. The teacher keeps careful records of guided reading; these include books read, running records, and any notes on specific reading behaviors. Sometimes teachers take a brief time—no more than one or two minutes—right after the group meeting to jot down important observations while they are fresh in the mind.

### *What the children do*

#### *Before the reading*

Children talk about the story, ask questions, and build expectations. The teacher's introduction supports their thinking about the story so that comprehension is foregrounded. Each child may be given a copy of the book to view while the teacher introduces it, or they may look at the teacher's book during the introduction and then receive the book to begin reading.

#### *During the reading*

Each child has a copy of the book and reads the whole text. The reading is usually soft or silent, but all members of the group are operating independently as readers at the same time. This is not "round robin" reading, in

which children take turns reading aloud. In guided reading each child has the opportunity to solve problems while reading extended text and attending to meaning. They construct meaning throughout the process, from their initial predictions about the story to examining the details of print in the text to their reflections after the story is read. Because their use of reading strategies are similar, the children in the group can read the carefully selected book at about the same rate and level of success, preferably with an accuracy rate above 90 percent. This procedure assures that children can process the words successfully without losing meaning; with a good introduction, they should need very little teacher help. Children sustain attention while problem solving an extended piece of text and, in doing so, build a system of strategies that they can use for reading other texts.

#### *After the reading*

Afterward children are invited to talk about the story they have read. Their individual responses are valued by the teacher. They may be guided to revisit portions of the text. A second reading of the text together at this point may be valuable if it focuses on fluent reading and smooth problem solving. Occasionally, children may be invited to extend the text through further discussion or activities such as writing, art, or drama.

#### *Evaluating Guided Reading*

As with any instructional approach, a teacher will ask herself, How do I know when I am using guided reading successfully? Ultimately, the test is whether the approach responds to the children's learning needs and helps them develop a self-extending reading system, one that fuels its own learning and enables the reader to continue to learn through the act of reading. Good readers have self-extending systems; they are independent. A teacher of guided reading does not have to wait for the results of end-of-year testing to know that the instruction

is successful. She will know that guided reading is effective if moment-to-moment observations and running records show that children are using effective reading strategies. She will also note that children are able to demonstrate effective reading behavior and read progressively more difficult texts accurately and fluently.

Children who are learning to read need to:

- Enjoy reading even when texts are challenging.
- Be successful even when texts are challenging.
- Have opportunities to problem-solve while reading.
- Read for meaning even when they must do some problem solving.
- Learn strategies they can apply to their reading of other texts.
- Use their strengths.
- Have their active problem solving confirmed.
- Use what they know to get to what they do not yet know.
- Talk about and respond to what they read.
- Expand their knowledge and understanding through reading.
- Make connections between texts they have read and between their own world knowledge and reading.

We sometimes mistakenly assume that these needs can be met just by providing good books and encouraging children to explore them. In fact, what most young readers need cannot be found in books alone. The process of reading must be dynamically supported by an interaction of text reading and good teaching. Guided reading serves this important goal.

#### *Suggestions for Professional Development*

1. Over a period of two weeks analyze your daily schedule. Ask yourself:

- How much time do I spend on reading instruction?
- Where does reading instruction appear in my schedule?
- How much reading instruction does each child receive each week?
- How much time do children spend reading extended text at an appropriate level?
- How much time do I spend in individual conferences? in whole-class instruction?
- How many books does each child read each week? (You may want to count or estimate the number of words [in text] each child reads independently each week.)

2. After answering these questions, you will have a greater awareness of how much supported reading children do and a good idea of the amount of time you need to allocate for guided reading. You will also know where reading instruction fits into your schedule. Ask yourself:

- Are my students doing enough reading?
- What kinds of texts are they reading? Are they too easy? too hard?
- Do I have at least an uninterrupted hour for working with small groups in guided reading?

3. Rearrange your schedule so that you have at least one hour per day for guided reading. Then begin setting up your management system (see Chapter 5).

# Guided Reading

Guided reading	Advantages of the Approach	Implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided reading is an approach where the teacher and the students talk, think and read their way purposefully through a text. In this approach the students are expected take responsibility for the reading with the support of the teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ supports students reading of challenging texts</li> <li>□ provides students opportunities to practice new strategies</li> <li>□ provides opportunities for teachers to provide support individual students   within a group setting</li> <li>□ allows teachers to teach strategies when and where they are needed.</li> <li>□ Gives teachers and students an opportunity to explore the features of the language used in a variety of texts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers need access to multiple copies of suitable material</li> <li>▪ The classroom needs to be arranged in a way that allows students to read together comfortably</li> <li>▪ The teachers will need to be able to manage small group teaching</li> <li>▪ Time planned in the daily schedule for guided reading to occur.</li> <li>▪ The other children need to be able to work on purposeful activities independently</li> <li>▪ Teachers need to be able to assess the learning needs of students.</li> </ul>

## Questions to consider when observing guided reading

- Is the teacher working with small groups of students?
- Are the rest of the students engaged in purposeful independent reading activities?
- Are the teacher and students clear about the purpose for the reading?